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PROFILE

Life in the Armed Forces

February 2001

Marine Reserve Field Exercise

Coast Guard Boatswain's Mate

Building Army Officers at West Point

LCAC

Driving the Navy's Land Rover

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SKIMMING THE SURFACE

The Navy's Landing Craft Air Cushion skims across the water like a plane and a boat. This unusual mode of transportation is just the thing for getting sailors, Marines and their equipment to the beach.

ON THE COVER: Seaman Tim Smock attached to Beachmaster Unit One, guides a Landing Craft Air Cushion carrying supplies and personnel ashore in support of exercise Strong Angel on Kawaihae, Hawaii. (Photo by Senior Chief Petty Officer Terry Cosgrove)

PROFILE

Director
Lt. Cmdr.
Gilbert A. Mendez, USN

Deputy Director
Maj.
Michael Durham, USA

Senior Enlisted Advisor
Senior Chief Petty Officer
Kevin Mills, USN

Managing Editor
Master Sgt.
Scott Clough, USAF

Production Manager/Editor
Sgt.
Ramona E. Joyce, USA

Staff Writer
Cpl.
Sandra Zarate, USMC

Circulation
Staff Sgt.
Sherrilyn Dean, USAF

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DoD High School News Service
PROFILE Magazine,
9420 Third Ave., Suite 110,
Norfolk, VA 23511-2129
Phone: Commercial (757) 444-1442
DSN: 564-1442
EMAIL:
mdurham@force.cnsl.spear.navy.mil
or
sclough@force.cnsl.spear.navy.mil

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT...

Each month on this page we spotlight servicemembers to show our readers the diverse opportunities the military services offer.

SPC. RONALD ALFORD
U.S. ARMY

Alford, an anesthesia technician at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., is originally from Texas City, Texas, and is a graduate of North Stafford High School. Part of his job includes preparing surgical carts and maintaining the anesthesia equipment. During his military career Alford has travelled to Bosnia and Nicaragua.

SEAMAN DAVID LANDES
U.S. NAVY

Landes, a gas turbine engine mechanic stationed at Little Creek Amphibious Base in Virginia Beach, Va., is originally from Lebanon, Penn., and is a graduate of Cedar Crest High School. Landes said the best part of his job is working with experienced people so he can learn from them. He has travelled to St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

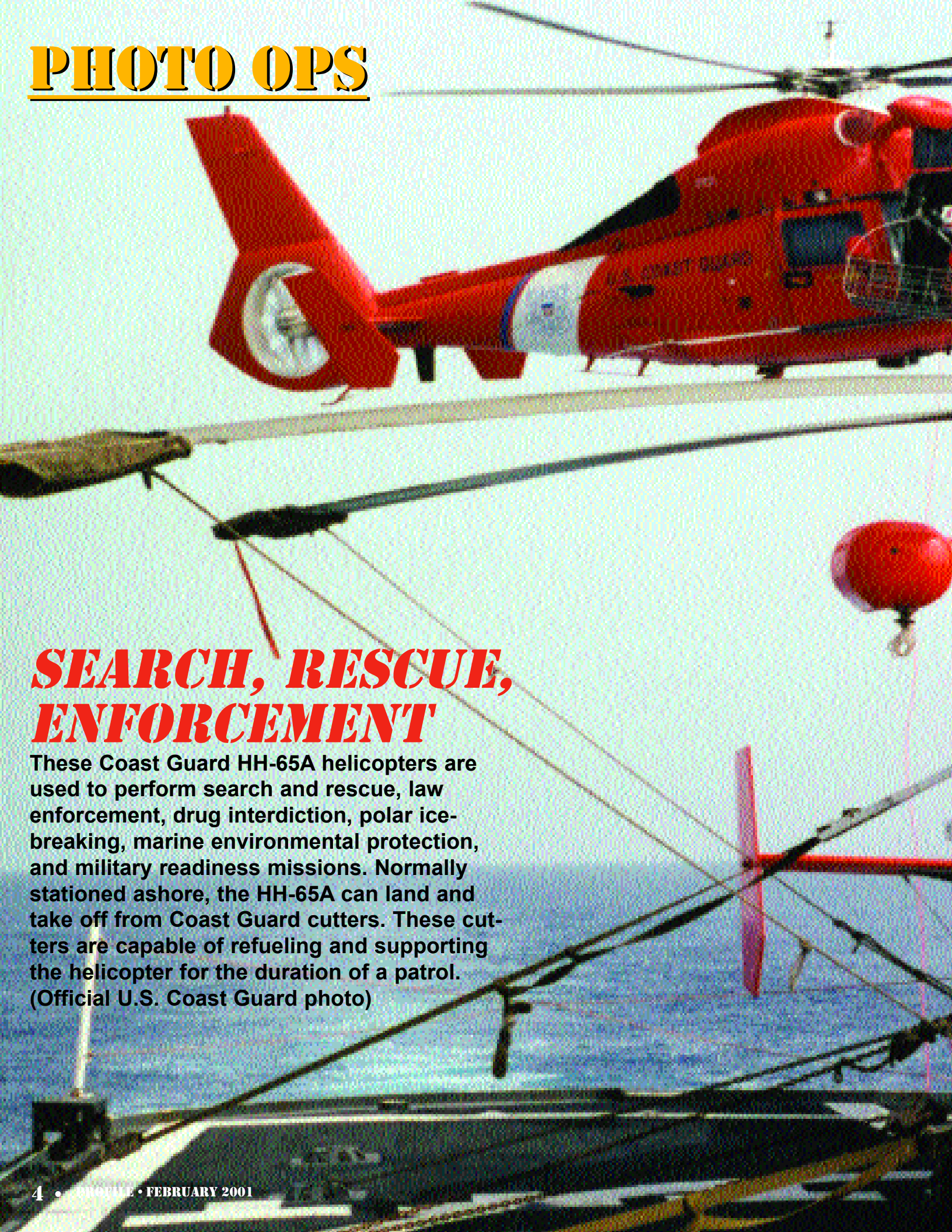
PFC. JOSHUA CALLOWAY
U.S. MARINE CORPS

Calloway, a tuba student stationed at the Armed Forces School of Music in Virginia Beach, Va., is originally from Lexington, S.C., and is a graduate of Lexington High School. His job includes lessons, band rehearsals and practicing. Calloway said the best part of his job is the professional development he receives.

STAFF SGT. AMY HENDRIX
U.S. AIR FORCE

Hendrix, a medical technician stationed at the Uniformed Services University in Bethesda, Md., is originally from Homerville, Ga., and is a graduate of Clinch County High School. Her job is to provide patient care to servicemembers and their families. One of her achievements was being named the university's Airman of the Year in 1999. Besides Maryland, Hendrix has travelled to Korea and Texas.

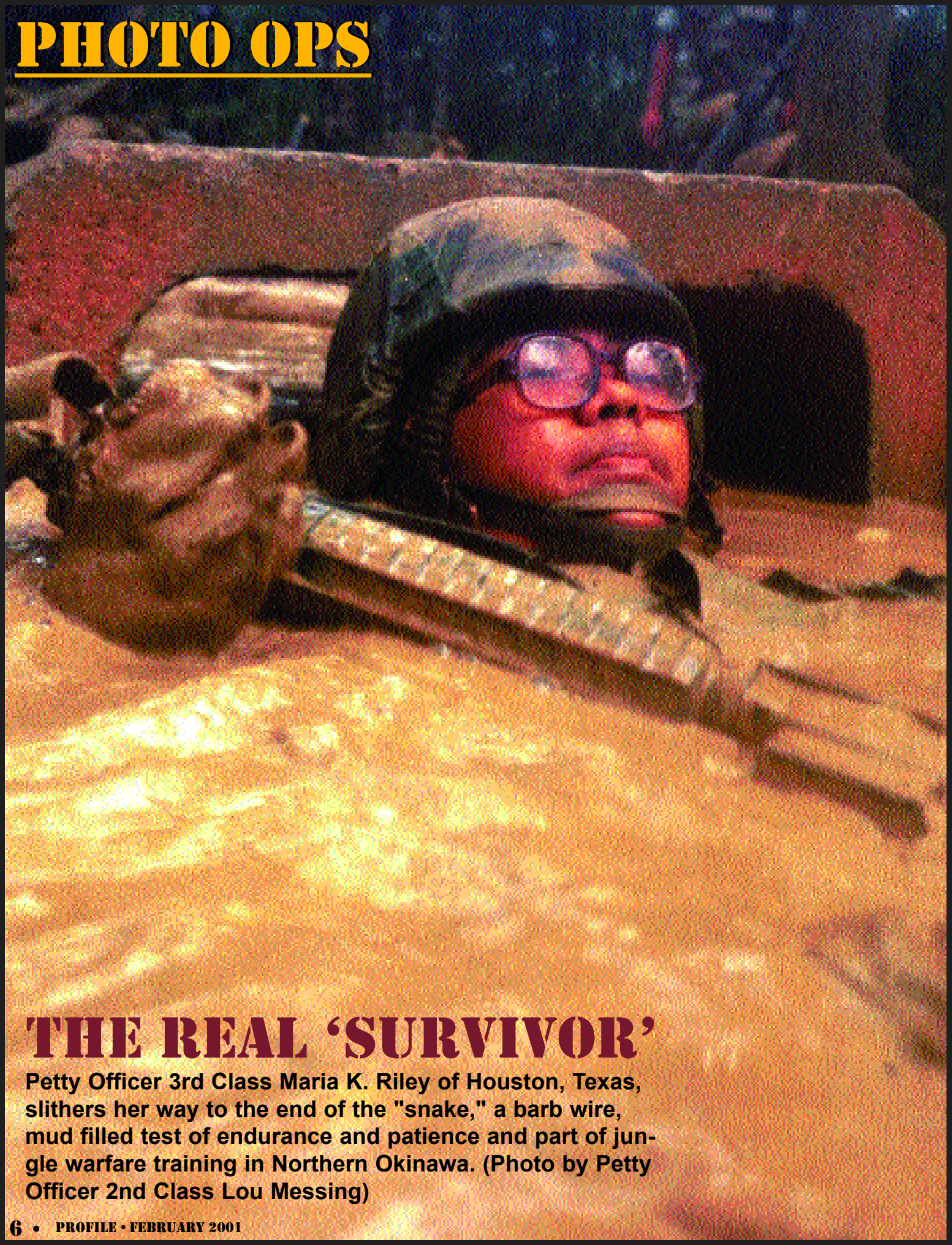
PHOTO OPS



SEARCH, RESCUE, ENFORCEMENT

These Coast Guard HH-65A helicopters are used to perform search and rescue, law enforcement, drug interdiction, polar ice-breaking, marine environmental protection, and military readiness missions. Normally stationed ashore, the HH-65A can land and take off from Coast Guard cutters. These cutters are capable of refueling and supporting the helicopter for the duration of a patrol. (Official U.S. Coast Guard photo)

PHOTO OPS



THE REAL 'SURVIVOR'

Petty Officer 3rd Class Maria K. Riley of Houston, Texas, slithers her way to the end of the "snake," a barb wire, mud filled test of endurance and patience and part of jungle warfare training in Northern Okinawa. (Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Lou Messing)

ENDURANCE TEST

Learning the ropes: Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Ronald Richards of New Orleans makes his way across a triple strand bridge at the beginning of the endurance course in Okinawa's Jungle Warfare Training Center. (Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Lou Messing)

NEWS BYTES

ARMY

On-line Education

The Army recently announced that Fort Benning, Ga., has been selected as one of three U.S. Army installations to pilot a new $453 million computer-aided, □distance-learning□ college for its soldiers.

With increasing numbers of high school graduates attending college, and educational demands growing with

expanding military roles and technology, the program seeks to address the Army□s recruiting and retention needs, Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera said.

□I think it will help us with recruiting and also to produce the better-educated and more technology-savvy soldiers that we□re going to need in the 21st century,□ Caldera said during a phone interview. □Seventy-five percent of high school graduates today are going to college, so we have to give (soldiers) a learn-while-you-serve option.□

The program will provide distance-learning via the Internet for about 80,000 soldiers during the next five years and will eventually expand to include all U.S. Army installations, Caldera said. Initially, soldiers will have access to about 30 universities that provide classes on-line. That list will also increase, he said.

Caldera said all areas of study will be open to soldiers and that the Army will pay 100 percent of tuition costs during service.

MARINE CORPS

Reach Out and Take It

Marine Pfc. Lisbeth Mendoza-Ruiz is a Mundelein, Ill., resident serving the nation overseas as an administration clerk assigned to 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force Headquarters on Okinawa, Japan. Mendoza-Ruiz is one

of the thousands of Marines looking for ways to take advantage of the numerous education benefits the Marine Corps offers. Many Marines are eligible for college credit through their military training and schools.

Servicemembers are also eligible for tuition assistance, which pays 75 percent of tuition and degree completion programs.

□Since I□ve been in the Marine Corps, I□ve seen all these opportunities to get an education,□ said Mendoza-Ruiz. □The Marine Corps is just giving it away, and it□s there for the taking.□

MASP

Enlistees in the Marine Corps have plenty of options to further their education in the military and one of those options is the Military Academic Skills Program. This program offers Marines individualized instruction in basic academic skills like math and English. Students have the option of taking the curriculum through either a 30-day satellite-based tele-conference course or an on-line instruction course. □Marines may want to take the MASP because they want to be officer candidates, because they want to make lateral moves or because they haven□t been in school for a while and want to brush up on basic skills before going to college,□ said Cpl. Fritz Jadotte, MASP program coordinator. □This program is flexible and paced for different ability levels and tailored for each student.□

For more information about jobs in the Marine Corps call 1-800-MARINES or visit their website at *www.Marines.com.*

NAVY

Signing Bonuses

The Navy has a new round of signing bonuses available for recruits who enlist in the Navy on or after Nov. 15, 2000. The signing bonus will be paid upon successful completion of final training in the skill for which a recruit enlists. Bonus requirements include a qualifying score and a high school diploma or GED.

College Bonuses

The Navy values educated, motivated young people, and offers them additional enlistment bonuses for college credit. When combined with the new bonuses, total cash incentives can reach up to $20,000. Specific amounts being offered to eligible applicants for education credits are:

-Associates degree □ $4,000

-Bachelors degree □ $8,000

-1 year/1,000 hours of vocational technical education □ $2,000

-2 years/2,000 hours of vocational technical education □ $4,000

-24-47 semester hours (or equivalent) of college □ $2,000

-48-71 semester hours (or equivalent) of college □ $3,000

-72-95 semester hours (or equivalent) of college □ $5,000

-96+ semester hours (or equivalent) of college □ $6,000

Educational Incentives

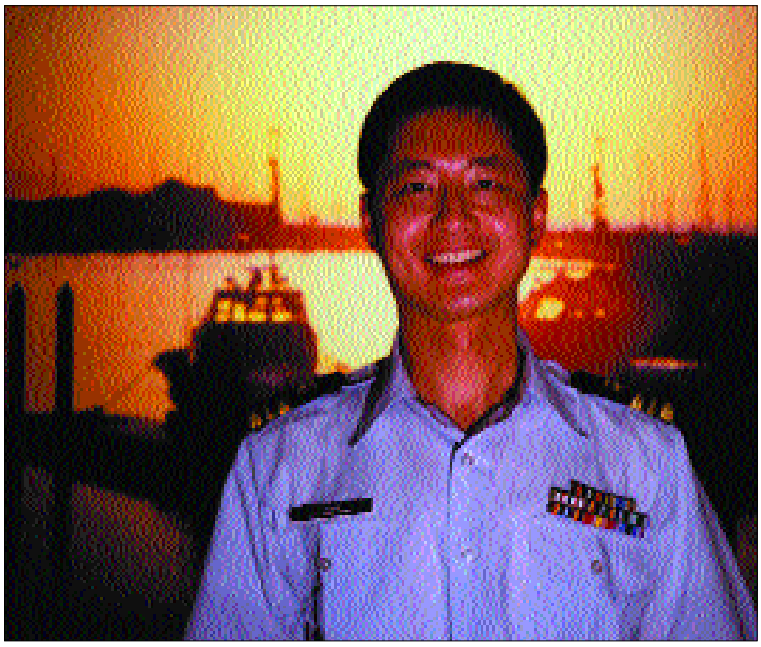
All recruits with high school diplomas or GEDs (earned by the end of their first enlistment)qualify for the Montgomery G.I. Bill (MGIB). High school graduates who earn a qualifying score on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) could more than double the MGIB benefit by choosing an eligible rating and the Navy College Fund (NCF) Option. Qualified applicants choosing a 4-,5-, or 6-year program can receive $30,000, $40,000, or $50,000 (in conjunction with MGIB) toward their future education. Some skills also offer a combination of signing bonus and NCF.

Qualified applicants seeking to pay back federally-funded student loans can enter eligible skill areas and receive up to $10,000 to pay back the principle on loans in good standing.

AIR FORCE

Air Force ROTC

The Air Force ROTC program is available at more than 900 colleges and universities around the country and offers scholarships to high school and college students with outstanding academic and leadership qualities. ROTC offers the General Military Course to students in the first two years of the program and the Professional Officer Course in the last two years. These programs are designed to build and exercise leadership skills. Air Force ROTC offers one- to four-year scholarships on a competitive basis to both high school and college students. Scholarship recipients will receive partial or full tuition, as well as a nontaxable monthly stipend.



COAST GUARD

Lawyer Program

The Coast Guard is offering qualified law school graduates the opportunity to serve as uniformed law specialists under the Direct Commission Lawyer Program. Law specialists are frequently involved in such diverse areas as military justice, trial advocacy, admiralty law, international law, environmental law, labor law and law enforcement.

Selectees are required to serve on active duty as Coast Guard officers. They attend a four-week Direct Commission Officer Course at the Coast Guard Academy, followed by a 10-week Basic Lawyer Course at the Naval Justice School. From there, the newly-commissioned law specialists report to their initial duty stations.

Since the Coast Guard is one of the country□s five armed forces, the pay and allowances are the same as for the other military services. Newly-commissioned lieutenants (junior grade) without prior military service earn between $35,000 to $41,000 per year in pay and allowances. Your exact pay would depend on whether you have family members and where you are stationed.

Benefits include free medical and dental care, 30 days paid annual leave, commissary and exchange privileges, low-cost term insurance, and tuition assistance for off-duty education.

Surf and Turf - The Navy's Land Rover

Story By Scott Vanier

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A landing craft air cushion deployed from USS Essex rushes the beach during an amphibious landing exercise with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit. An LCAC skims across the water creating a cushion of air beneath itself to hover over the water and has two large propellers for propulsion, making the LCAC extremely versatile. (Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Crystal M. Brooks)

ate for work.

Whether it's the
weather, traffic or
hanical breakdowns,
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ts or surly looks from
agers and colleagues.
the crew of the Navy's
ding Craft Air
hion, or LCAC, is late
work - by as little as
econds - they may be
ted by enemy gunfire.

If they're early by so much as one second, they could land in the middle of a barrage of friendly fire preparing the beach for an amphibious assault.

The challenge for sailors of Assault Craft Unit 4 aboard Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek is to move more than 1,600 Marines and sailors, their equipment, weapons systems and cargo from ship to shore during an amphibious assault operation quickly. If they're not at the job site within a 30 second window, the consequences are far more severe than those most people face if arriving late for work.

LCACs are the Navy's hovercraft. There are only two facilities in the world that maintain these craft: Assault Craft Units 4, on the East Coast, and 5 on the West Coast. The East Coast facility at Little Creek operates and maintains 36 of the $22 million craft.

An LCAC is a high speed, over-the-horizon, ship-to-shore amphibious landing craft that can land on more than 75 percent of the world's coastlines. The LCACs are used to move supplies, weapons systems, and personnel to points of need during amphibious operations and may be assigned to support mine lane breaching, humanitarian assistance or personnel transport operations. Assault Craft Unit 5 is the only other operational LCAC command in the Navy. Together, these commands give the Navy Marine Corps team a potent weapon in amphibious and expeditionary warfare.

Because an LCAC "flies" on a cushion of air, it can travel at high speeds over water and land. Operating from amphibious ships equipped with well decks that can be flooded to operate amphibious vehicles, the LCAC can carry loads as heavy as Marine tanks at speeds of 46 mph. By

combining high speed, exceptional maneuverability and long-range qualities with the ability to travel over land, the LCAC is a versatile weapon in the amphibious arsenal. These capabilities mean amphibious forces can mount a full-scale assault on enemies from anywhere.

At one time conventional landing craft, or LCUs, could land on only 15 percent of the world's coastlines. After World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War, military leaders recognized the need for improved landing craft. They wanted something with more speed, range and mobility. In October 1977, the Navy established the Assault Landing Craft/Experimental Trials Unit at Panama City, Fla., to test two air cushion vehicle prototypes.

The tests were successful and LCAC production began. The first craft was delivered to Assault Craft Unit 5 in December 1984. On Feb. 1, 1986, Assault Craft Unit 4 was commissioned in Panama City and accepted the delivery of its first craft - and the Atlantic Fleet's first LCAC - on March 18, 1987.

In November of 1987, Assault Craft Unit 4 changed its home port from Panama City to Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek. Since then, the command's LCACs have been deployed throughout the world taking part in major amphibious operations.

Most recently, Detachment "Charlie" returned from a deployment in the Mediterranean During that deployment, three LCACs from Assault Craft Unit 4 supported an Marine Expeditionary Unit stationed aboard an amphibious ready group led by the USS Saipan.

This six-month operation reinforced the LCAC as unique asset in warfare.

"No other military in the world operates a hovercraft with half the capabilities we have," said Lt. John Galdieri, assistant operations officer at Assault Craft Unit 4.

Preparation for a six-month deployment takes an LCAC detachment nine months. Broken into four stages, the first leg of training puts the five-man crew in a self-assessment period, which means figuring out what's broken and fixing it. This phase may include any necessary training for personnel to operate the craft.

The second stage is refresher training. For many weeks, the crew and craft practice mock assaults on beaches up and down the East Coast.

The third phase, which is the halfway point of the nine-month preparation, puts the LCACs inside an amphibious ship with Marines and their equipment. During this phase the crew teaches Marines how to onload and offload their humvees, light armored vehicles, M1-A1 tanks and five-ton trucks between the ship, the LCACs and the beach.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Leroy F. Alexander Jr., communicates with the navigator before the training exercise.

The last stage is a 15-day "mini-deployment" where more than 1,800 sailors and Marines perform a mock assault on Onslo Beach at Camp Lejeune.

There are constantly several detachments in various stages of the work-ups at any given time. While one detachment is now beginning the first stage of the nine-month process, another one is already midway through its cycle as it prepares to deploy later this year with the Kearsarge Amphibious Ready Group and relieve the LCAC crews currently deployed with the Nassau Amphibious Ready Group. Extensive preparation helps ensure that LCACs are not late for work. And when the consequences of tardiness are as severe as the ones these crews face, the hard work done at Little Creek is worthwhile.

Teamwork spells success

Story and photos by Cpl. Sandra Zarate. USMC

Just over the horizon comes an unusual looking thing. Is it a boat, a plane? It's a little bit of both. It's a landing craft air cushion, and it takes a team of sailors to operate such an unconventional craft.

"The mission of the high-speed over-the-horizon assault craft is to get Marines and sailors from their ship out at sea to the shore during an amphibious assault mission, on time," said Chief Petty Officer Randy L. Searcy, the craftmaster for LCAC 70, one of 36 LCAC teams at Assault Craft Unit 4 at Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base in Little Creek, Va. "It can be stressful to know you only have a 30-second window to work with in order to get the mission accomplished, but our team has never failed a single mission so far. I believe it's because I have a strong team on my side, working on one of the most incredible craft the Navy has to offer," said the Barstow, Calif., native.

"This craft can hover up to five feet above the ground or water until its fuel runs out, and it's capable of [landing on] more than 70 percent of the world's beaches," he said. "We could also get on the interstate, if the terrain allowed us to. This is just an amazing craft."

LCAC teams are made up of five crewmembers; a craftmaster, engi-

neer, loadmaster, navigator and deck mechanic.

"My job as a craftmaster is to drive the boat and oversee everyone else's job on board," Searcy said. "I am responsible for the safety of my crew, the craft and for making sure the mission is accomplished on time."

Even though Searcy is in a supervisory position, he says everyone in his crew gets down and dirty when it comes to getting the job done, including him.

"My crew works hard, and when we need to get something done, we all work together to get it accomplished." Searcy said. "No one ever sits around while one of our crewmembers is struggling to finish a job. That wouldn't make for a good team."

It's important for every crewmember to know every job on the LCAC.

"We have to learn each other's jobs because you never know when the unexpected might occur during a routine mission," said Petty Officer 3rd Class Donald R. Jones, a Houston native and deck mechanic for LCAC 70. "I am responsible for pretty much fixing anything that breaks aboard the LCAC," according to the five-year veteran. Jones is capable of repairing or replacing any component of the LCAC when out at sea, he said. "I fix things as big as engines and replace things as small as oil filters," Jones explained.

But he couldn't possibly do it all by himself.

"While under way, I am always in constant communication with the engineer," Jones said. "The engineer sees the problem first on his computer screen then determines where and what the specific problem is."

From there the information is relayed back to Jones so he can fix the problem.

Petty Officer 1st Class Antonio C. Bengson is the engineer for LCAC 70, and has been working on LCACs for 10 years. "My job is to start the engines, monitor temperatures, and make sure the LCAC has proper fuel levels," Bengson explained. "When we're out on a mission and there's a mechanical problem, the deck mechanic and I have to determine whether the mission stops or continues as scheduled," he said.

Jones and Bengson aren't the only ones that work side by side.

"The craft's navigator and loadmaster also work hand in hand," said Searcy.

Navigating the seas using radar systems is Petty Officer 1st Class Brett Balog's role as the navigator aboard LCAC 70. "When we're out flying I have to listen to five or six radios at once while checking my radar to make sure we don't hit anything," Balog said. It can be tough at times, but he wouldn't be able to do it without the loadmaster. "The loadmaster is my second pair of eyes," Balog explained. "I am in charge of loading the deck with Marines, their equipment and making sure we do not exceed 75 tons, which is the maximum weight capacity of the LCAC," said Petty Officer 2nd Class Leroy F. Alexander Jr., the loadmaster aboard LCAC 70. "I am also the lookout for the navigator."

After doing his pre-flight checks, Chief Petty Officer Randy L. Searcy is ready to drive LCAC 70 to sea for another routine training exercise.

Petty Officer 1st Class Brett Balog, the navigator aboard LCAC 70, helps wash the craft. The craft must be washed after every mission, because salt water could corrode the LCAC.

Since the navigator and loadmaster sit on opposite sides of the craft it's difficult for the navigator to see what's happening on the left side. That's why they have to stay in constant communication with each other while under way, something the entire crew takes pride in.

"Working with a small group of guys is great, because of the close communication we've developed with each other," Jones said.

So far, the crew has been working together for more than six months and Alexander said it is like having a second family.

"I know what everyone expects out of me and I know what to expect out of everyone else. From the chief on down, we all work together as a team," he said.

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BOMBS AWAY

Arming fighter jets with ammo

By Staff Sgt. Alexandra Mace,USAF and Master Sgt. Scott Clough, USAF

They work and train like a finely tuned pit crew at the Indianapolis 500 where every second counts. But unlike pit crews supporting drivers in a professional race, these airmen support F-15 fighter pilots before and after combat.

Fighter pilots need a pit crew to provide more than fuel or tires to get back to the fight.

They need missiles and bullets - some of which are the most advanced in the military today. In other words, they need "ammo."

That's where munitions crews at Langley Air Force Base, Va., come into play. They load a multi-million dollar F-15 with the most sophisticated air-to-air missiles. They also load 20 mm bullets about three or four times the size of ammunition used in high-powered rifles. The importance of this mission was demonstrated when the 1st Fighter Wing was the first Air Force unit to deploy in response to Desert Shield/Storm in August 1990.

But lifting a 200-pound missile by hand and calculating its replacement on an F-15 is just one of the tasks these teams perform on a daily basis.

Known as load crews, these three-person teams are part of the munitions and weapons maintenance career field in the Air Force. They refer to themselves proudly as "Ammo."

Staff Sgt. Jay Jarvis, a team chief with the 71st Fighter Squadron at Langley and a 14-year veteran, said he ended up in this career field after he signed on as "open electronics" in his enlistment contract with the Air Force. After six weeks of basic training, he spent four months in technical school to learn the basics of aircraft armament systems.

After technical school, weapons loaders go to their first assignment, where it can take anywhere from three to 30 days to get fully qualified on loading the aircraft at that base.

"Then, once a month you will go back to the load barn (a supervised practice area) and load to keep proficient and certified," Jarvis said. "You also do ICTs, or integrated combat turnarounds, which consist of loading a jet after it comes back from a mission to get it back in the air as soon as possible."

Jarvis has served at a variety of bases with fighter aircraft like the F-15 Eagle and F-16 Fighting Falcon. Those assignments have included Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Shaw Air Force Base, S.C., Royal Air Force Bentwaters and Lakenheath, United Kingdom, Pope Air Force Base, N.C., and Langley. In addition, he's deployed to Turkey six times, and to Bahrain and Saudi Arabia in support of operations enforcing no-fly zones over Iraq.

Besides loading aircraft in preparation for missiles, load crews also take care of tool boxes and test equipment, and check weapons systems for reliability.

"It has its ups and downs, but I've enjoyed it," he said. "I have traveled a lot in 14 years and wouldn't trade it for anything."

Jarvis recently participated in an annual competition with his crew at Langley in which he won against the 94th and 27th fighter squadrons' best crews. It gave him a chance to show what he does every day to accomplish his mission.

Competitions between units with similar missions have become commonplace in the Air Force as a way to boost morale and bring out the best in people through constant practice. Load crews normally get about four months to prepare.

Each load crew has three positions. The chief is responsible for the overall operation.

The second person prepares the aircraft for loading while the third prepares munitions and transports the missiles with a lift truck - identical to real-world loading.

"Working as a team is paramount," said Tech. Sgt. Gregory Everhart, who oversees load-crew training for 1st FW. "Everyone's steps have to be remembered. Their goal is to do it quickly, but safely."

Evaluators inspect each teams' tool kits to make sure they comply with regulations. Kits are made up of 120 tools load crews need to do their jobs. The kits have to meet strict guidelines, such as being properly positioned, marked and cleaned. After the inspection, each team answers a 50-question written test based on technical data used on the flight line.

They then begin the meat of the competition - actually loading the way they would during combat operations. Teams are timed separately on a series of weapon loads they routinely do in daily operations.

Each team starts by loading 50 rounds of 20 mm ammunition into the F-15's Gatling gun. Next they load two AIM-9 Sidewinder (air intercept) heat-seeking missiles by hand. Afterward, they use a lift truck to load

(Below) Staff Sgt. Jay Jarvis, 71st Fighter Squadron weapons load chief, installs 20 mm ammunition into an F-15 Gatling gun. (Photo by Senior Airman Tanika Bell)

(Above) Staff Sgt. Charles Woolard works on an AIM-120C missile during a load competition while one of his teammates helps out. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Andy Bellamy)

four AIM-120s and two AIM-7 Sparrow missiles, which are guided by the F-15's radar system.

They finish the load by installing 120 chaff and 24 flares, part of the aircraft's defensive system. Chaff are small bits of metal the aircraft dispenses in flight to confuse enemy radar. Flares are dispensed by an aircraft as a decoy for heat-seeking missiles.

Jarvis' crew did this in 61 minutes - out of a maximum 90-minute time limit.

"My two guys worked hard - they ran the load and I pushed the checklist."

His crew included Senior Airman Jason D. Watson, a four-year veteran originally from California, and Eric J. Swerock, a four-year veteran from Pittsburgh, Pa.

Jarvis and his crew had just returned from a Northern Watch deployment to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, where F-15s were enforcing the no-fly zone in northern Iraq.

He said it wasn't hard for them to transition because they load in their daily operations.

"On a day-to-day basis, we don't do a full combat load," he said. "For F-15 training missions, we do partial loads." But Jarvis said the type of load they did during the competition would be the same used in combat.

"It takes precision and continuity to be able to accomplish a load properly," Everhart said. "This competition is huge among weapons loaders. It reminds people that we put the 'combat' in Air Force."

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on guard

Marines practice defensive tactics

Story by Sgt. Sam Kille, USMCR
and Cpl. Kimberly Lopez, USMC
Photos by Sgt. Sam Kille

In the games of basketball, soccer and ice hockey, the competition can be tough and adrenaline runs hot. In all of these sports, a good defense can make or break the team's success.

However, a good defense is not always about fun and games. The Marine reservists of 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, recently went out to "play" during a field exercise at West Point, N.Y., honing defensive skills needed to hold an enemy at bay.

"Practicing the defense is something we don't do as often as we should," said Lt. Col. Paul Maubert, the commanding officer of 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment. "Through this exercise, the Marines [of the battalion] will be better prepared."

As in any game, the first thing the Marines had to do was come up with an attack plan. They set up a headquarters and assigned Marines to guard the rear area.

Cpl. Alexander Krutovskiy, an administrative clerk with the 25th Marines, keeps a watchful eye while performing rear-area security during a battalion field exercise at West Point, N.Y.

Lance Cpl. Jack Marchese, a nuclear, biological and chemical specialist with 2nd Bn., 25th Marines, plots contaminated areas on a map following a tear gas attack during a battalion field exercise at West Point.

Lance Cpl. Flavio Rivera-Lopez, of Jackson Heights, N.Y., kept his eye out to detect suspicious enemy movement. "I'm really glad we had the opportunity to do this because you never know when we might be faced with a real-life situation like this," he said.

While some Marines set up the headquarters, others spread throughout the rocky, wooded terrain in search of enemy activity. This was no easy feat, as they trudged through nearly half a foot of snow, which made for a more challenging environment.

"A lot of coordination goes into building defenses, and the weather can be a factor," said Maj. Ralph A. Douglas, a battalion officer. "We had a few challenges [the battalion planned to use trucks to spread its Marines out farther but could not due to the deep snow in some areas]. However, we were able to adapt and improvise."

"This is just another clime and place," said the Sparta, N.J. resident. "This battalion has a lot of experience in this environment and training hasn't been hampered yet."

During the exercise, the Marines separated into two teams. One team played the defense, while the other team, Marines from the Dragon Platoon, played offense.

As night shrouded the area, the defensive Marines set

out on patrol. Packing light weapons (loaded with blanks), they hiked in small groups through the woods, searching out the enemy. They met them on more than one occasion. The enemy, the offensive Marines, had set up ambushes along the route. As soon as the aggressors were sighted, the Marines radioed in to headquarters to decide on a defensive strategy. If things looked good, the Marines would engage in a close-combat firefight. If the situation didn't look so hot, they would radio in for the big dogs -- 81 mm mortars. The mortarmen were more than happy to take care of business.

Lance Cpl. Flavio Rivera-Lopez, an administrative clerk with the 2nd Bn., 25th Marines, mans a M-240G machine gun during a battalion field exercise at West Point.

"We were the battalion commander's hip-pocket artillery," said Lance Cpl. Michael L. Cassidy, of Whitestone, N.Y. "Whenever they needed rounds, we put them there."

Just when the Marines started to settle into the environment, something new headed their way: nuclear, biological and chemical defense training. When the call "Gas! Gas! Gas!" was sounded, the Marines had to quickly put on their gas masks, or be stung by tear gas (simulating poisonous gases), which causes a temporary burning sensation to any body part it contacts.

"We haven't been doing enough NBC training," said Maubert. "I really wanted to intensify that level of training during this exercise."

After a challenging day (and night) in the field, one Marine left the exercise anticipating his next chance to test his skills.

"Because [as reservists] we only do this once a month, every minute counts," said Maubert. "This exercise was very well thought out and was a brilliant learning experience. West Point offered us the opportunity to train in a steep, heavily wooded area that favored the defense. It was perfect infantry country, I couldn't have asked for more."

Lance Cpl. Rayllin Suero (kneeling) and Lance Cpl. Michael Cassidy, mortarmen with Weapons Co., 2nd Bn., 25th Marines, prepare their 81 mm mortar for firing.

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FORGING THE L

West Point, N.Y., has played a critical role in the history of the United States since the earliest days of our nation. Soldiers in the Continental Army were drilled by the Prussian Baron Von Steuben on the West Point plain. Later in the Revolutionary War, West Point was fortified by the Polish civil engineer Thaddeus Kosciuszko, and became a formidable military installation that allowed Continental soldiers to control a portion of the mighty Hudson River. Benedict Arnold earned his infamous place in history, while serving as West Point commander, for conspiring to turn the post over to the British.

The U.S. Military Academy was established at West Point in 1802 by President Thomas Jefferson, and the first two cadets graduated later in the year. These two young men would prove to be the first in what would become known as "The Long Gray Line." This nickname for the cadets and alumni refers to the unbroken line of officers to serve the nation.

Many of the United States' greatest generals, and two of its presidents, have been part of the Long Gray Line. The list of illustrious graduates includes legendary leaders like Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee; George Armstrong Custer and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson; Douglas MacArthur and George Patton; Omar Bradley and Dwight D. Eisenhower; and Norman Schwartzkopf. Both Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Erik Shinseki are West Point graduates.

But a long, rich history and proud tradition are only a part of what makes West Point a special place. Today almost 200 years after its founding, the military academy retains its status as one of the nation's most revered educational institutions because it has never strayed from its primary mission: taking some of America's finest young men and women and helping to shape them into some of the nation's finest leaders.

One young person currently being shaped is Cadet Lauren Miree Rowe, who completed her first year at the academy this past spring.

"The first year went by so fast, I can hardly believe it," Rowe said. "There were some rough days, even some rough weeks, but it was mainly exciting."

Like most cadets admitted to West Point, Rowe graduated near the top of her high school class and received high scores on her college entrance exams. She also played soccer and ran track. In addition, she is following a family tradition. Her father graduated from the academy in 1973, and her sister will be starting her senior year in the fall.

"I think I decided to attend West Point by listening to my dad talk about how good the academy was for him," Rowe said. "My sister also contributed by coming home with stories about what it was like here. I began to view the academy as a challenge, and I started telling myself 'I can do this.'"

Liking to overcome challenges and an innate confidence that she can accomplish virtually anything are traits Rowe shares with many other West Point cadets.

"If you put your mind to it, nothing is going to stop you. If you really want to do something, you'll be able to do it," Rowe said. "I've always been good at setting goals and working toward them. I was the kid my parents never had to remind to do my homework. Its something internal, something I've had since I was born."

Rowe had her pick of other colleges to choose from, but she said she chose

ONG GRAY LINE

Story and Photos by Staff Sgt. John Valceanu

West Point because "the military academy graduates I've met were head and shoulders above graduates from other colleges."

Like Rowe, Cadet Steven Langan, who started his final year last fall, decided to attend West Point because of a personal experience; a week-long invitational academic workshop sponsored by the academy. The workshop allowed Langan a glimpse of what student life is like at West Point, and he said he was hooked.

"When my parents came to pick me up, I told them: 'This is where I'm going to school,'" Langan said.

Though he does not come from a military family, Langan said he was committed to military service.

"I come from a small town in Oklahoma. God and country were the big values in my family, and they're the most important things in my mind," Langan said. "My whole life, I'd been thinking about the military. If I hadn't come here, I'd have either enlisted or done ROTC at another university. I believe military service is a very honorable profession, and it allows you to live for something higher than yourself."

Langan's perfect 4.0 average in high school and his status as class valedictorian, along with his exemplary test scores, made him a good candidate for the academy. He said his participation on the track team also went a long way toward helping him prepare for West Point.

Running prepared me for West Point by building self-discipline, Langan said. The discipline which allows you to go out and train when you don't want to, not letting anything stop you helps at West Point.

Langan is majoring in mathematics and systems engineering. He said the academics are "very rigorous, but rewarding. And if you find yourself getting behind, there are many opportunities to get help. Teachers are always available to work with you if you need a little extra help."

The cadet has some advice for individuals considering attending the academy: He thinks people should carefully consider their motives for becoming cadets.

"Cadets who attend the academy for the wrong reasons probably will not be successful. You shouldn't come here to build your resume," Langan said. "You should come here because you want to be an officer in the Army and to lead troops."

While the military academy offers a world-class education free of charge to those able to gain admission, Langan points out that the experience is very different from that found at civilian institutions of higher learning. Cadets at the military academy have requirements placed upon them that students at other colleges, even ROTC cadets, do not have.

Maj. Tim Schroyer, an electrical engineering instructor, agreed with Langan. He said the academy "expects a lot from the cadets," and imposes a broad scope of requirements upon them.

"Academy cadets have a very regimented schedule, and the resulting time constraints make life difficult for them, particularly for students majoring in time-consuming, hard science subjects," Schroyer said. "When I was an ROTC cadet majoring in electrical engineering, I had the luxury of going into the lab at night and spending all night working. Here, if their work is not completed by a certain time, they don't get a chance to do it."

Typical academic days for cadets include a pre-breakfast morning formation, four hours of classes in the morning , a lunch formation, another two hours of classes and a couple of hours of athletic activity before

dinner. Cadets normally spend three or more hours studying after dinner.

Each class in the corps contains about 1,000 cadets, all of whom study a common core of academic subjects. On top of the broad studies afforded by the common core, cadets select individual majors or fields of study in which they conduct more in-depth studies. Additionally, cadets must complete military science sessions and eight semesters of physical education.

While cadets may have the freedom to choose individual majors, all cadets minor in some form of engineering, such as civil or environmental or electrical. The only degree awarded by the academy is the bachelor of science.

"When we teach an academic subject, we try to help the cadets see how it applies to the military," said Lt. Col. Daniel Ragsdale, a computer science instructor. "All cadets get an introduction to computer science, and we try to show them that this isn't just a technical issue, it is an issue of warfare."

Ragsdale said the academy's computer lab was built from salvaged machines, which were refurbished to bring them up to required specifications. Though it saved tens of thousands of taxpayer dollars, the lab provides cutting-edge training capabilities that allow cadets to develop an intimate understanding of the possible computer threats they could someday face.

Cadets sheathe their sabers as they enter Washington Hall to eat lunch. Tradition is incorporated into virtually all aspects of the cadets□ day, including meals.

"We focus on developing the ability to degrade the enemy's capabilities while protecting our own," Ragsdale said. "And while the focus of the academy is on teaching, we also conduct research during the summer. We believe that we're better able to teach our students by conducting our own research into our areas of interest."

Ragsdale said he is very impressed with caliber and quality of the cadets who come through his classroom.

"They're excited to be at West Point, and they're excited about learning," Ragsdale said. "They're also the highest caliber undergraduate students in the nation, and they consistently display a level of understanding beyond what I had expected in a graduate program."

Class of 2000 cadets march onto the field at Michie Stadium at the beginning of the graduation ceremony. The spectacle marks the end of four years of intense study for the graduating cadets.

Male and female cadets play hard and have fun during intramural sports competitions. West Point cadets are required to participate in sporting events.

Ragsdale said the academy's faculty is also a "great mix" of permanent military faculty, civilians and officers who serve as instructors for three years and return to their Army specialties.

"Civilians enhance the program with their different perspectives, and permanent faculty provide continuity," Ragsdale said. "Officers like me who rotate in and out of the teaching jobs bring a lot of real-world experience to the department."

Away from the classrooms, cadets live two to a room in barracks that are very much like regular college dorms, however, lights are out by midnight each weeknight. Weekends are often taken up with military training, as is part of each summer. Freshmen cadets, known as "plebes," are rarely allowed to leave the installation, and even cadets in later years require passes to go offcampus.

Cadet Dave Lambron, who began his final year at West Point last fall, reflected on his academy experience.

The first two years were long, rigorous and regimented, Lambron said. "It was not much fun, but I know that it prepares you well for being a good leader."

Lambron said many cadets complain about the rigors, but he doesn't think they're really complaining.

"We're always saying that we don't want any more challenges, we want to have it easy, but I don't think we mean it," Lambron said. "People who don't like challenges don't make it into West Point, and if they do they won't be here long."

First-year Cadet Brandon Stankiewicz echoed Lambron's sentiments.

"You really have to want to be here. I talk to friends who are in college who are going out and having fun at night instead of being in the barracks, and I get a little envious sometimes," Stankiewicz said. "But I know you have to be willing to make sacrifices in order to do well here."

Like Lambron and Stankiewicz, second-year Cadet Gavin Rice is ready for a little more freedom than the military academy offers him, but he's also cognizant of the growing process resulting from the West Point experience.

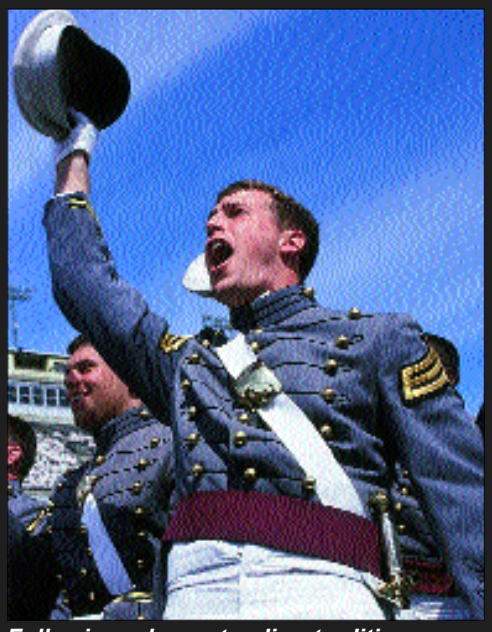
"As a 23-year-old prior-service soldier, I sometimes get a little tired of being stuck in my room at night," Rice said. "But I wouldn't trade a day of it. The academy helps you understand the world 'sacrifice.' It teaches you the value of time and how to carefully figure out how much time will be required to accomplish each goal. The experience is very satisfying, but it's not easy. If it were easy, everyone would do it."

Rice said he is particularly grateful for the opportunity to attend the academy. He was a wheeled-vehicle driver at Fort Carson, Colo., when his company commander suggested he apply to the U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School at Fort Monmouth, N.J.

"I didn't have the best grades in high school, and I certainly never thought I'd be here at the academy," Rice said. "The Army offered me a job I wanted after high school, and I took it. Then I was offered a chance to attend the Prep School, and I took that. Now I'm here.

For me, West Point is a gift given by people who see something in you they believe in, and who then allow you a chance to serve society," Rice said.

Cadet candidates use teamwork to clamber over an obstacle course during the Sandhurst competition, an international event that pits American, English and Canadian cadets against each other.



Following a long-standing tradition, cadets cheer for the □goat,□ the graduating cadet with the lowest grade-point average.

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Coast Guard Driver's Ed

Story and photos by
Cpl. Sandra Zarate, USMC

Raging waves don't seem to stand a chance when he is out on patrol. That's because the U.S. Coast Guard considers Petty Officer 3rd Class Stacey A. Barr a master of seamanship, capable of performing virtually any task at sea.

He's a boatswain's mate at the U.S. Coast Guard Search and Rescue Station on Virginia's Eastern Shore at Cape Charles, Va.

A boatswain's mate is a demanding job, Barr explained. "My job is tough at times, because I have to know a lot about everything dealing with small boats," he said.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Stacey A. Barr is put in charge of securing the boat to the pier before his crew ever sets one foot off the boat.

Since the Coast Guard doesn't have a formal boatswain's mate school for active duty personnel, he received on-the-job training at his first duty assignment. He had his first taste of a boatswain's mate's life aboard the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Morganthaw in Alameda, Calif. Barr said he mainly performed maintenance work aboard the boat.

After that assignment, he went to work on the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Edisto, a 110-foot Island Class patrol boat, homeported in San Diego. But his stay aboard the Edisto didn't last long. He quickly picked up rank to petty officer third class and transferred to Cape Charles.

Barr was excited about working for a search and rescue station, he said. "I couldn't wait to get out there and start saving lives," Barr said. The only thing stopping him from taking part in the action was knowing how to drive the 41-foot utility boat used for search and rescue missions. He decided to learn everything there was to know about this boat, and attend a coxswain's course.

The course is a four-week class offered at the Coxswain School, located at the Utility Systems Center at the Coast Guard Training Center in Yorktown, Va. The course teaches boatswain's mates how to drive and maintain a 41-foot utility boat. "The extra training made me a more knowledgeable boatswain's mate," he said. "The first few days of class were taught inside the classroom. We didn't get to practice on the 41-foot UTB until the fourth day," he said.

Barr already had some experience doing boatswain's mate work, so the first few days were like a refresher course. He practiced everything from tying ropes to navigation, said the Clinton, Md., native. "During the navigation part of the class, I had to figure out where I was on the water by using radar, charts and the global positioning system. Then I had to figure out where I was headed and how long it was going to take me to get there."

Barr was excited when the navigational part of the course came around. Not only did he learn a lot, he had fun doing it. "I love driving boats. I've been around boats all of my life," said the Surratsville High School graduate. "My grandfather had a boat, and I loved going out in the water with him."

Barr also learned a little bit about engines during his training. "We learned how to fix minor engine problems," he said. "We learned enough of the basics to know what might be wrong with the engine to get us back home."

Students take turns driving the utility boat during a training exercise at the Coxswain□s Course at the U.S. Coast Guard Training Center in Yorktown, Va.

Barr was impressed with the quality of training he received. "The instructors were extremely dedicated and experienced at what they were teaching us," Barr said. He never had a problem with the instruction at the course, but felt confident that if he ever did, the instructors would have been more than willing to help.

"We are here for the students," said Petty Officer 2nd Class William D. Hollandsworth, an instructor at the Coxswain "C" School. "If our students are not understanding something, we will spend additional time with them until they fully understand."

During the second part of the class, Barr learned how to take water out of a sinking boat, tow another boat and fight fires. He also learned how to perform search patterns, something that will come in handy at his current duty station.

"At Cape Charles, we usually answer distress calls. I have to know how to search for boats and people stranded out at sea," he said. "The training I have learned here will definitely help me be a better boatswain's mate.

Barr boards the boat and gets ready for their trip home back to headquarters.

Coxswain □C□ School students learn to use the 41-foot utility boat because it□s the most-commonly used boat in the Coast Guard for search and rescue missions.

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